

American

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Cooperation Is Key to Asia-Pacific Region Success, Secretary Kerry Says	1
Secretary Kerry Promotes Climate Message in Asia Travels	1
Chinese, U.S. Officials Prepare for Dialogue in Washington.....	2
Thousands of New Citizens Help U.S. Celebrate Birthday	3
Vice President Biden Praises Croatia's Accession to EU	3
Sustainable Development of Mekong River Important to U.S.	4
Environmental Toolkit Helps World Find U.S. Products	5
Polar-Orbiting Weather Satellite on Track for 2017 Launch.....	5
President Obama Launches Major African Trade Initiative	6
President Obama Unveils Massive Electric Power Initiative for Africa.....	7
Supreme Court Decisions Highlight Evolving Nature of Civil Rights	8

Cooperation Is Key to Asia-Pacific Region Success, Secretary Kerry Says

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 03 July 2013

Washington — The Asia-Pacific region is “the envy of the rest of the world” for its economic success and stability, says U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, but its continued success will hinge on greater cooperation and effective resolution of disputes.

“The Asia-Pacific region is enjoying an almost unparalleled period of peace, prosperity and stability,” Kerry said July 2 in remarks delivered at the East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei.

“The key to sustaining and advancing this success has been our common efforts to establish norms and institutions that encourage greater cooperation and resolve disputes when they arise — and to do so in a manner that respects the rights of the people,” Kerry said.

“The United States,” the secretary said, “firmly believes that regional institutions such as the EAS should play a lead role in shaping the future of the Asia-Pacific. We support the East Asia Summit as the region’s primary institution for political and strategic issues.”

The East Asia Summit is a regional leaders’ forum for strategic dialogue. Members are the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), as well as Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United States and Russia. These countries represent 55 per cent of the world’s population, and account for almost 55 per cent of global gross domestic product. Kerry was attending the ministerial EAS meetings; President Obama will attend the EAS leaders meetings in October.

According to Kerry, the East Asia Summit, “like any institution, is most effective when it produces concrete results for the people of the region.” He identified the pressing challenges facing the region today as maritime security, disaster relief, nonproliferation and climate change.

Kerry expressed U.S. concern over rising tensions and the increase over the past year in maritime incidents in disputed waters, especially in the South China Sea, where several countries have overlapping territorial claims. The area serves as transit for one-third of the world’s shipping, and its seabed may hold significant oil and gas reserves.

“We all have a vital interest in the peaceful management of maritime disputes, and we believe the EAS can serve a key role in setting and enforcing norms and rules that will ensure we are working collectively to protect the regional peace and stability that our economic future depends on,” he said.

Regarding relief efforts in response to natural disasters, Kerry called for effective international coordination to alleviate human suffering. “Promoting the exchange of expertise and removing barriers to the deployment of supplies and first responders saves lives,” he said. “That calls for coordinated mechanisms to ensure that this goodwill can be translated quickly into practical assistance on the ground.”

Kerry emphasized the Obama administration’s commitment to a world without nuclear weapons. The United States, he said, will work toward a new international framework for peaceful nuclear power, and work to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Kerry added: “In no uncertain terms, we also reject North Korea’s and Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and will work to enforce the international nonproliferation system.” The secretary lauded the EAS member states’ efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The secretary also said the region has a “moral responsibility to address climate change.”

“This is not just about air and water and weather — it is about jobs and opportunity,” Kerry said. “So let me make clear that the United States is strongly committed to working with the people of the Asia-Pacific region to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change.”

Kerry has been in Brunei since June 30 to participate in several annual conferences through July 2. He co-chaired the ASEAN-U.S. Ministerial Meeting, the Lower Mekong Initiative Ministerial Meeting, and the Friends of the Lower Mekong Ministerial Meeting on July 1. On July 2, the secretary participated in the 20th ASEAN Regional Forum and the 3rd East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers’ Meeting.

While in Brunei, Kerry participated in other bilateral meetings with Bruneian officials, including with the sultan of Brunei.

Secretary Kerry Promotes Climate Message in Asia Travels

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 03 July 2013

Washington — President Obama announced new actions to slow down climate change June 25 in Washington. Secretary of State John Kerry was overseas echoing the

message in meetings with counterparts from allied nations, emphasizing the imperatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and step up alternative fuel use.

In New Delhi, even before the president's announcement, Kerry had climate change on the agenda for meetings with Indian officials. After a June 24 meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, Kerry announced that the two nations will form a working group "to intensify our efforts to find out ways that we can bilaterally join together in order to address the urgency of climate change."

After a swing through Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Israel focused on the regional conflict, Kerry returned to climate change discussions with meetings in East Asia. The urgency of addressing climate change was on the table when Kerry met with member nations of the Lower Mekong Initiative and the East Asia Summit.

He called the East Asia Summit (EAS) a primary institution for dealing with political and strategic issues, and in that capacity, shared what Kerry called "our moral responsibility to address climate change."

The secretary of state repeated the president's warning that climate change is no abstract hypothesis, looming off in the future. It's here. Now.

"The devastating effects of climate change," Kerry said, "threaten us with widespread water and food shortages, historic heat waves, prolonged droughts, more intense flooding. And this is not just about air and water and weather — it is about jobs and opportunity."

Climate change offers an ominous future for industries such as agriculture and fishing when the balance of environmental factors that produce yields in those industries may be disrupted.

That was a message with particular resonance in Brunei, where Kerry attended the ASEAN-U.S. Ministerial Meeting and the ASEAN Regional Forum. This marine nation recently banned shark fishing in its waters in view of the diminished populations, an action that demonstrates the nation's understanding of the environmental forces at work today, Kerry said.

"The United States welcomes Brunei's commitment to conservation, particularly its proposed EAS study on enhancing sustainable fisheries management and marine environmental conservation." Kerry offered U.S. assistance for this effort.

The Obama administration sees solutions to climate change in the reduction of greenhouse gases that can be

achieved with a move away from carbon-based, highly polluting fossil fuels. The transition to a new clean-energy economy, officials say, presents opportunities for innovation, economic growth, emerging technologies and job creation.

Kerry said in Brunei that the United States is pursuing that future with the U.S.-Asia-Pacific Comprehensive Energy Partnership, formed in late 2012 with Brunei and Indonesia. The partnership is devoted to expanding energy and environmental cooperation throughout the region. Similar to compacts formed in other regions, the partnership will focus on development of renewable and cleaner energy sources; markets and interconnectivity; the emerging role of natural gas; and sustainable development.

Chinese, U.S. Officials Prepare for Dialogue in Washington

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 03 July 2013

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry and Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew will host the fifth meeting of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue with Chinese leaders in a two-day Washington conference.

"The Dialogue will focus on addressing the challenges and opportunities that both countries face on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global areas of immediate and long-term economic and strategic interest, and will follow up on discussions Secretary Lew had with China's new leadership in March and Secretary Kerry had in Beijing April 13-14," according to a Treasury Department announcement July 2.

Joining Kerry and Lew in the two-nation talks will be Chinese co-chairs State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Vice Premier Wang Yang, along with members of the Chinese delegation and their U.S. colleagues.

The two-nation meetings have been described by both U.S. government and Washington policy experts as a practical means for promoting political trust, constructive engagement and collaboration between the two largest global economic powers. The dialogue follows closely on the intensive but informal June 7-8 talks between President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Annenberg Retreat in Rancho Mirage, a resort area just outside Palm Springs, California.

The U.S.-China relationship is as important as any other bilateral relationship the United States has for shaping the trajectory of the global economy and global security in the 21st century, according to White House senior officials.

At a press briefing following their meeting in June, Obama told journalists, "I emphasized my firm belief to

President Xi that it is very much in the interest of the United States for China to continue its peaceful rise because if China is successful, that helps to drive the world economy and it puts China in the position to work with us as equal partners in dealing with many of the global challenges that no single nation can address by itself."

"We've got a lot of work to do to take these broad understandings down to the level of specifics, and that will require further discussions not only today and tomorrow, but for weeks, months, years to come," Obama said. "But what I'm very encouraged about is that both President Xi and myself recognize we have a unique opportunity to take the U.S.-China relationship to a new level."

The U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue was established by Obama and former Chinese President Hu Jintao April 1, 2009, when the two leaders met on the sidelines of the Group of 20 London Summit. They established the dialogue to allow high-level U.S. and Chinese officials to discuss relevant economic, political and geostrategic issues.

The dialogue is composed of a strategic track and an economic track, but the range of topics varies from bilateral relations to counterterrorism measures, and trade and finance to economic development and cybersecurity.

The dialogue grew out of the former Senior Dialogue and Strategic Economic Dialogue, begun under former President George W. Bush.

Thousands of New Citizens Help U.S. Celebrate Birthday

03 July 2013

Washington — In celebration of its 237th birthday, the United States is welcoming more than 7,800 new citizens in more than 100 naturalization ceremonies across the country and overseas from July 1 to July 5.

"The United States has a long and proud tradition as a welcoming nation, and we continue to attract hardworking people from across the world who want to contribute to this country in purposeful ways," said Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano in a July 2 Homeland Security press release. "During Independence Day week, we welcome men and women who have come from all walks of life to serve our country and become our fellow citizens."

"As a first-generation American, taking part in this ceremony has special meaning for me," said Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew. "It takes incredible resolve to become a citizen of this nation, and we benefit greatly

from those who make this journey."

Lew welcomed 30 new citizens July 3 at the Department of the Treasury in Washington. White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough will join a July 4 ceremony with 101 new citizens at George Washington's Mount Vernon in Mount Vernon, Virginia.

New citizens will take the Oath of Allegiance during ceremonies all around the country, including at Crater Lake National Park in Crater Lake, Oregon; the Chicago Cultural Center in Chicago; Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia; Saguaro National Park in Tucson, Arizona; the National World War II Museum in New Orleans; the Freedom Tower in Miami; and the Seattle Center in Seattle.

This year's celebration of citizenship also will feature special naturalization ceremonies at sites integral to America's struggle to maintain independence and defend freedom, including the USS Midway Museum in San Diego; the Battleship Missouri Memorial at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Historic Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota; Fort Necessity National Battlefield in Farmington, Pennsylvania; Saratoga National Historical Park in Stillwater, New York; Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial in Put-in-Bay, Ohio; and aboard the USS Constitution in Boston.

Thirty-five members of the U.S. armed forces will take the Oath on July 4 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano will naturalize six military members at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Nine recruits will be naturalized during basic training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, allowing them to serve their adopted country as U.S. citizens.

Approximately 100 people will become citizens during naturalization ceremonies before baseball games at McCoy Stadium in Pawtucket, Rhode Island; New Britain Stadium in New Britain, Connecticut; Iowa Cubs Ballpark in Des Moines, Iowa; and TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater, New Jersey.

The United States is asking new citizens and their families and friends to share the experience and photos at their ceremonies via Twitter using the hashtag #July4Nat.

Vice President Biden Praises Croatia's Accession to EU

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 02 July 2013

Washington — Croatia's accession to the European Union July 1 is a significant achievement that belongs to the Croatian people, Vice President Biden says.

"Croatia's success was far from inevitable. In fact, it is a testament to the courage of its citizens and leaders who overcame the temptations of ultranationalism and resentment," Biden wrote in a commentary published in the July 2 issue of Financial Times.

Biden said letting go of the past is a daily struggle, but the "Croats kept faith with an ambitious vision and built the democratic institutions that opened the doors to NATO and now the EU."

"This achievement belongs to the Croatian people. But it also speaks to the transformative power of the European project guiding countries toward the rule of law, open markets, prosperity and peace," the vice president added.

Biden said Croatia's membership in the EU raises the stakes for its Balkan neighbors, who face the risk of being left behind.

"Over time, the borders of the EU should unite the countries of southeastern Europe rather than divide them. We hope that one day its citizens will benefit from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership we are negotiating with the EU," he said.

Croatia said on July 1 that it would help other Balkan nations move closer to the EU, with the aim of bringing political stability and economic prosperity to the region. Croatia is the 28th European nation to join the EU and is the second former Yugoslav republic to join, following Slovenia in 2004.

"I am delighted to send best wishes to the people of the Republic of Croatia as you celebrate entry into the European Union," Secretary of State John Kerry said. "Today is an occasion to honor Croatia and the many achievements of its citizens."

Kerry said the Balkan nation has worked diligently for more than a decade to gain EU membership.

"I know it was not always an easy path. I commend Croatia's perseverance and the courage of your leaders and citizens as Croatia has rebuilt its economy and government structures to meet European Union standards," Kerry said.

Croatia, a nation of 4.2 million people, endured four years of war after declaring independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Croatia joined NATO four years ago.

"It has been a NATO ally since 2009 and a contributor to security around the world, including Afghanistan," Biden said.

"Once other countries sent peacekeepers to Croatia; now Croatia contributes to peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Haiti and the Western Sahara," he said.

Sustainable Development of Mekong River Important to U.S.

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 02 July 2013

Washington — Smart, sustainable development should be the goal in preserving the Mekong River, and the United States is actively helping make that goal a reality.

At the Sixth Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Ministerial Meeting, held July 1 in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, recalling his experiences on the Mekong River during his service as a young man in the U.S. Navy, said he has "a passionate commitment" to trying to make sure that the natural resources of the Mekong's unique ecosystem are preserved.

The Mekong River, some 4,350 kilometers long, is the seventh-longest river in Asia and runs through China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. These countries, assisted by the United States, have been cooperating in efforts to keep the river healthy enough to support the estimated 70 million people dependent on it.

"Sustainable is not just a word, it's a practice," Kerry said. "It is essential that we redouble our efforts to balance the demand for resources with sustainability and to develop cooperative approaches."

To this end, Kerry said, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is going to implement its sustainable Mekong program, which supports the requests of LMI country governments to have technical assistance for infrastructure. This includes the Mekong Partnership for the Environment, which engages civil society and the private sector to support smart infrastructure.

"We plan to engage our government's scientists in order to support improved land use and planning through the cooperation of both USAID and NASA," Kerry said.

"We're developing a new project," the secretary said, "that will combine the educational resources of schools and governments and the private sector in the United States and in ASEAN in order to increase the number of skilled workers in LMI countries."

"And we're working to stop the spread of infectious diseases like H7N9," or avian influenza, Kerry said. "We're also providing technical communication skills and English-language training, and we're improving agriculture and food security through the use of new tools that will make these efforts more efficient, more

effective.”

USAID Deputy Administrator Greg Beck, who also spoke at the LMI Ministerial Meeting, said USAID has helped found the LMI Coordination Hub at its regional office in Bangkok.

One of the successes of the past year, Beck said, was the LMI Regional Health Pillar Working Group meeting, which focused on enabling cross-border collaboration on infectious disease surveillance and counterfeit drug regulations. He noted that the United States and LMI partner countries are working together to narrow the development gap in ASEAN through the delivery of training courses, technical assistance, trade facilitation, capacity building and human resources development.

USAID, Beck said, has started a new project called Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (COMET). This program will increase the number of skilled workers in targeted sectors such as science and technology, through innovative approaches using technology and partnerships.

At the LMI Ministerial Meeting, officials representing the LMI nations noted a number of important health priorities: prevention and control of emerging infectious diseases; prevention and control of counterfeit and substandard medications; and identifying and sharing best practices in public health.

The ministers resolved to support wider implementation of the International Health Regulations, as adopted by the almost 200 members of the World Health Assembly. The ministers also expressed a need for developing regional strategies for public health responses to potential shared problems, such as food safety, chemical or nuclear accidents and bioterrorism.

The LMI ministers also endorsed a plan to expand agricultural trade and investment and increase engagement with the private sector.

For the first time, the minister approved a plan of action for regional market development, power interconnection, energy efficiency, good governance, and research and development.

Environmental Toolkit Helps World Find U.S. Products

02 July 2013

Washington — The U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have launched an interactive online buyer’s guide that will help buyers around the world easily find the U.S. products most useful to them.

Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Francisco Sánchez on July 1 announced the availability of the U.S. Environmental Solutions Toolkit. The Toolkit offers users an all-encompassing approach to solving specific environmental issues.

“By linking environmental regulations and research with technology providers, the Toolkit is a one-stop shop for implementing a U.S.-solutions model for a variety of environmental problems,” Sánchez said in an International Trade Administration (ITA) news release.

The Toolkit will serve foreign buyers of environmental technologies by helping them identify EPA-regulated solutions for specific environmental issues and understand the science and standards of those remedies. It offers a list of U.S. technology and service providers to resolve their issues.

“This product was the genesis of cooperation between the U.S. government and the private sector” and will advance U.S. environmental-protection goals around the globe, Sánchez said.

The Toolkit is a Web-based resource that combines EPA expertise on solving environmental challenges with ITA’s catalog of U.S. providers of related technologies. It emphasizes user-friendliness, featuring a series of interactive menus, search functionality and adaptive formatting to allow for a range of mobile uses, EPA said in its own news release July 1.

“The Environmental Solutions Toolkit shares EPA’s knowledge and experience with our global neighbors, making it easier to move environmental protection efforts from concepts and ideas to action,” said EPA’s Assistant Administrator for International and Tribal Affairs Michelle DePass.

EPA and the Commerce Department are working together to support the U.S. government’s Environmental Export Initiative, which promotes American environmental technology in the global marketplace.

The United States is the global leader in the environmental technologies and services sector, generating approximately \$312 billion in annual revenues and employing nearly 1.7 million workers, the agencies said.

Polar-Orbiting Weather Satellite on Track for 2017 Launch

02 July 2013

Washington — The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Joint Polar Satellite System recently completed two key reviews at NASA’s Goddard Space

Flight Center and is continuing a steady, on-schedule and on-budget march toward the 2017 launch of JPSS-1, the second in a series of next-generation polar-orbiting weather satellites.

"Completing these reviews demonstrates the success and progress we are making within the overall JPSS program," said Harry Cikanek, NOAA's JPSS program director. "I am proud of the work our combined NOAA/NASA team has done to aggressively implement this program and deliver our products on budget and on schedule."

Two additional reviews will monitor the overall readiness of JPSS and are expected to occur this summer.

The JPSS satellites represent significant scientific advances for more accurate weather forecasting that saves lives, eases the flow of commerce, and protects the economic interests of the public and private sectors during severe weather events, NOAA said in a press release.

The satellites are a follow-on from the Suomi National Polar-Orbiting Partnership satellite, the first spacecraft in the JPSS series, launched on October 28, 2011.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage U.S. coastal and marine resources.

President Obama Launches Major African Trade Initiative

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 01 July 2013

Washington — President Obama on July 1 launched a major trade partnership between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa aimed at expanding trade.

Obama told a meeting of 22 chief executive officers in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that "Trade Africa" is designed to expand trade and economic ties between Africa and the United States and global markets.

"Today, I'm announcing a new initiative — Trade Africa — to boost trade with and within Africa, starting with the East African Community," Obama said at the business roundtable.

The initiative aims to facilitate trade by focusing on moving goods across borders faster and cheaper, he noted.

"We'll work with the countries involved to modernize customs, move to single more efficient border crossings, reduce bottlenecks, reduce the roadblocks that stymie the flow of goods to market," he said.

Obama told business leaders that the United States is setting specific goals for itself and East Africa that include moving goods faster between ports like Dar es Salaam and Mombasa to Burundi and Rwanda in the interior; reducing wait times for truckers at border crossings; increasing East African exports to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) by 40 percent; and doubling trade within East Africa.

"Those are the goals we're setting for ourselves under Trade Africa and here in East Africa," the president said. "And we intend this to be the foundation for similar progress regionally that we can do across the continent in years to come."

Trade Africa will initially focus on East African Community (EAC) members — Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The United States expects to expand the trade initiative to other African economic communities and nations.

"The EAC is an economic success story, and represents a market with significant opportunity for U.S. exports and investment," the White House said in a fact sheet.

The EAC countries, with a population of more than 130 million people, were selected because they have increasingly stable and pro-business regulations, according to the White House. The five nations have what the White House described as promising local enterprises that have formed creative partnerships with multinational corporations.

They were also selected for the first phase of Trade Africa, the White House says, because the EAC countries benefit from the emergence of an educated, globalized middle class.

"Intra-EAC trade has doubled in the past five years, and the region's GDP [the broadest measure of a nation's wealth] has risen to more than \$80 billion — quadrupling in only 10 years," the White House said.

U.S. Trade Representative Mike Froman told journalists at a briefing July 1 that the president has stressed throughout his African trip the importance of trade and investment as a crucial element in the U.S. development strategy with the region.

"There has been substantial progress over the last several years on the trade and investment front. Trade between the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa is up about 2.5 times over the last decade," Froman said. "We export about \$22 billion of goods, and we import about \$50 billion — mostly oil and minerals."

Froman added that the non-oil trade of AGOA has

tripled, but it's still a small amount.

"As we've reached the period of time where we want to renew AGOA, we're going to take a hard look at what has worked well, what hasn't worked well, how to improve upon our experience with AGOA so that we can increase the non-oil-related trade between the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa," Froman said.

Froman acknowledged with reporters that the regional economic communities like EAC, the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States, have made considerable progress in reducing trade barriers among themselves and are now working to link with other economic communities.

EAC has a customs union, which is an advanced form of trade cooperation with a common external tariff, he noted. It helps to foster greater trade integration, but more needs to be completed, he said.

The Obama administration has set increasing trade between the United States and the African continent as a significant focus of the August 9-13 AGOA Forum being held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The AGOA Forum will celebrate progress achieved through the U.S. trade act since it became law in 2000, and will serve as a means for its renewal by 2015.

Obama's visit to Dar es Salaam is the final leg of a three-nation trip to Africa that has included stops in Senegal and South Africa.

President Obama Unveils Massive Electric Power Initiative for Africa

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 30 June 2013

Washington — President Obama June 30 announced a massive initiative to double access to electricity across sub-Saharan Africa. The United States will support the effort with a \$7 billion investment over the next five years.

Obama said the aim is to provide electric power to millions of Africans, enhancing their lives and livelihoods.

"Today I am proud to announce a new initiative. We've been dealing with agriculture, we've been dealing with health," Obama said at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. "Now we're going to talk about power — Power Africa — a new initiative that will double access to power in sub-Saharan Africa."

The president said that in partnership with African nations, the United States will develop new sources of energy. Obama said America's vision is a partnership with Africa that unleashes achievable growth.

"We'll reach more households not just in cities, but in villages and on farms," he said. "We'll expand access for those who live currently off the power grid."

"A light where currently there is darkness; the energy needed to lift people out of poverty — that's what opportunity looks like."

The president unveiled "Power Africa" in his address to a crowd of 1,100 at the University of Cape Town, part of a weeklong trip to three African nations including Senegal and Tanzania.

According to presidential adviser Gayle Smith, more than two-thirds of the people living in sub-Saharan Africa do not have electricity, including 85 percent living in rural areas. The United States and its private sector partners in the first phase will focus on electric power expansion in six countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Tanzania, according to the White House.

Power Africa will also partner with Uganda and Mozambique on oil and natural gas resources management.

Power Africa, the White House said, will bring a broad range of U.S. government tools to support investment in Africa's energy sector. These tools include provision of policy and regulatory best practices, pre-feasibility support and capacity building, long-term financing, insurance, guarantees, credit enhancements and technical assistance.

Private sector giants — including General Electric, Symbion Power, Heirs Holdings, Aldwych International, Harith General Partners, Husk Power Systems and the African Finance Corporation — are expected to make an additional \$9 billion in initial commitments, the White House says. They will help support the development of more than 8,000 megawatts of new electricity generation in sub-Saharan Africa.

The International Energy Agency estimates that sub-Saharan Africa will require more than \$300 billion in investment to achieve universal electricity access by 2030, the White House says. "Only with greater private sector investment can the promise of Power Africa be realized," the White House added.

Obama also said the United States will bolster access to food and health programs across the continent with the goal of reducing poverty and illness plaguing many areas of Africa.

Earlier in Cape Town, Obama, first lady Michelle Obama and daughters Malia and Sasha visited Robben Island prison, where the ailing former president of South Africa,

94-year-old Nelson Mandela, was confined in a tiny cell during the apartheid era. South African politician Ahmed Kathrada, who was also held in the prison for nearly two decades and was an anti-apartheid activist, guided Obama and the first family on their tour of the prison complex. Kathrada was also Obama's guide when he first visited Robben in 2006.

Obama wrote in the prison guest book, "On behalf of our family, we're deeply humbled to stand where men of such courage faced down injustice and refused to yield. The world is grateful for the heroes of Robben Island, who remind us that no shackles or cells can match the strength of the human spirit."

After their visit to Robben Island, Obama visited the Archbishop Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation Youth Center to highlight efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and the role the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has contributed. Obama met with Tutu and young students at the community center.

Supreme Court Decisions Highlight Evolving Nature of Civil Rights

By Bridget Hunter | Staff Writer | 28 June 2013

Washington — It might seem strange that in a government of the people, by the people and for the people, the guardianship of constitutional rights rests with nine individuals appointed for life, yet that model has served the United States effectively for more than two centuries.

The Supreme Court of the United States tends to be a quiet, dignified body — contemplative, deliberative and conscious of the responsibility vested in it as the ultimate arbiter of constitutionality.

The court shares power in the federal government with the presidency and Congress in a system of checks and balances established by the U.S. Constitution.

World attention usually focuses on the executive (the president) and legislative (Congress) branches, but every year at the end of June, the judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court, grabs headlines as it releases key decisions in cases argued since the previous October.

Two recent high-profile decisions highlight the evolving nature of both U.S. society and the interpretation of laws intended to protect individual rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

THE DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE ACT

In *United States v. Windsor*, argued March 27 and decided June 26, the court affirmed a lower court decision that the

federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is unconstitutional because it deprives individuals of equal liberty.

"DOMA's principal effect is to identify and make unequal a subset of state-sanctioned marriages. It contrives to deprive some couples married under the laws of their State, but not others, of both rights and responsibilities, creating two contradictory marriage regimes within the same State," the court found. "It also forces same-sex couples to live as married for the purpose of state law but unmarried for the purpose of federal law, thus diminishing the stability and predictability of basic personal relations the State has found it proper to acknowledge and protect."

The decision was received warmly by the White House.

"I applaud the Supreme Court's decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act," President Obama said in a June 26 statement. "This was discrimination enshrined in law. It treated loving, committed gay and lesbian couples as a separate and lesser class of people. The Supreme Court has righted that wrong, and our country is better off for it."

THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The president was less pleased with the court's finding in *Shelby County, Alabama v. Attorney General Holder*, which was argued February 27 and decided June 25.

The court found "Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act is unconstitutional; its formula can no longer be used as a basis for subjecting jurisdictions to preclearance" [of changes to voting procedures].

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted to address entrenched racial discrimination in voting, particularly in southern states. Section 4 of the act provides a "coverage formula," and defines the "covered jurisdictions" as states or political subdivisions that maintained tests or devices as prerequisites to voting, and had low minority voter registration or turnout in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The coverage formula and preclearance requirement, which apply to nine states and some counties in other states, initially were set to expire after five years, but were reauthorized several times, most recently in 2006, without changes to the coverage formula.

On June 25, the court held that in the half-century since the Voting Rights Act became law, the conditions in the United States have "changed dramatically," and the law's "extraordinary and unprecedented features" have been successful in achieving voting registration and turnout parity between covered and uncovered jurisdictions.

Despite that success, Congress continued to reauthorize the act as if nothing had changed, the court said.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing the majority opinion, said the coverage formula Congress reauthorized in 2006 ignores 50 years of progress, “keeping the focus on decades-old data relevant to decades-old problems, rather than current data reflecting current needs.”

In a June 25 statement, President Obama expressed disappointment with the decision, saying that “invalidating one of [the act’s] core provisions upsets decades of well-established practices that help make sure voting is fair, especially in places where voting discrimination has been historically prevalent.”

However, he agreed with the Supreme Court’s directive that Congress should revisit the issue. “I am calling on Congress to pass legislation to ensure every American has equal access to the polls. My Administration will continue to do everything in its power to ensure a fair and equal voting process.”

A Supreme Court decision is the highest level of judicial review and frequently the final step in the exercise of federal authority that begins in Congress, is carried out by the executive branch and is reviewed and interpreted by the judicial branch.

Each year, litigants in hundreds of cases petition the Supreme Court seeking a “writ of certiorari” — or agreement of the court to hear an appeal from a lower court. Less than 1 percent of these cases are accepted for review. In an average annual term, the court hears arguments in about 120 cases.

The Supreme Court is rarely a “court of first review” — it does not rule on issues of fact except in disputes between states or with another nations. The vast majority of its work involves appeals of lower court decisions, generally involving issues of federalism (the extent of federal government authority vs. state authority) and constitutionality (whether a lower court ruling is in accordance with the U.S. Constitution).

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